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SUBJECT: TFGG01: AUGUST 20: FRENCH PRESIDENCY ON SITUATION  
IN GEORGIA

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Kathleen H. Allegrone. Reasons 1.4b,d

¶1. (C) We met August 20 with Boris Boillon, who normally covers NEA issues but was filling in for a colleague who covers Russia and the CIS, at the Elysee to discuss the missing copy of the six-point cease-fire accord with Russian President Medvedev's signature. Boillon handed over a Russian language text (sent separately to the task force and others) containing Medvedev's signature. He explained that the main cause of the recent confusion over conflicting versions of the document signed by Russian and Georgian leaders was due to Russian FM Lavrov maneuvering French FM Kouchner into a "corner" and coaxing him into agreeing to chapeau language that appeared to elevate Russia's status from that of party to the conflict to one of the guarantors of the accord. This chapeau did not appear in any other version of the text. Sarkozy, who had worked out the main points himself with Medvedev and Saakashvili, was not immediately aware this side-discussion was going on or that Lavrov, whom Boillon described as a very crafty hardliner, had unilaterally added language.

¶2. (C) Boillon affirmed several times that the GOF considers only the original version of the six points -- without the chapeau -- to be the authoritative text. Sarkozy realized what the Russians had done, adamantly refused to accept the chapeau, and did not sign the document. Boillon acknowledged, however, that the Elysee had not realized that two variations of the text were in play when the Secretary took the draft accord to Tbilisi for President Saakashvili to sign.

¶3. (C) On point five of the document, and in general, what was key, in Paris' view, was the beginning of a process to manage and ultimately remove the Russian presence, with international oversight, as opposed to allowing the Russians carte blanche in terms of imposing their own rules on the ground. France seeks a "realistic" outcome, and Boillon stressed that all interested parties need to fully appreciate the "reality on the ground" and take into account ) and avoid ) the possibility for Russia to establish a fait accompli.

¶4. (C) Boillon described Sarkozy's telephonic exchanges with Medvedev as extremely frank. Medvedev in the last conversation promised that all Russian troops, except for 500 "blue helmets," would be withdrawn from Georgian territory by no later than August 21. According to Medvedev, the "blue helmets" (a term Boillon claimed Medvedev insisted on using) would remain in a buffer zone just south of the boundary of South Ossetia. Sarkozy reminded Medvedev that failure to

live up to his commitment by the evening of August 21 would leave Sarkozy with no choice but to convene the Council of Europe to review the EU's relationship with Russia. Medvedev took the point but warned Sarkozy not to resort to threats, adding that, if faced with a choice between defending Russia's image or its security interests, there was no question that Medvedev would defend Russia's security interests. Boillon noted that Medvedev made clear to Sarkozy his poor regard for Saakashvili as well as Medvedev's view that a U.S.-armed Georgia is inconsistent with Russian national security.

15. (C) Sarkozy, according to Boillon, is determined that the Russians implement their commitments under the cease-fire agreement but is not seeking confrontation with the Russians. His top priority is verifying Russian compliance with its promises. We asked, in the context of the recent op-ed piece that ran in "Le Figaro" and "The Washington Post," what Sarkozy meant by regarding Russian actions in Georgia as a single action but not necessarily as an indication of a greater and more menacing reorientation of Russian policy. Does France not consider Russian actions in Georgia serious enough to warrant a tough response? Boillon answered that Russian actions in Georgia have been completely disproportionate, and he repeated that the way forward would test whether the now prevalent notion of a more threatening and assertive Russia was truly valid. In that context, the U.S. and France needed to coordinate their response. France wants to be firm but does not want to press too quickly for open confrontation with Moscow.

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